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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000362

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA AMBASSADOR QUINN, INL/FO, NSC FOR AHARRIMAN  
AND KAMEND

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: KARZAI URGES SUPPORT FOR GOVERNOR-LED ERADICATION;  
HELMAND REPORTS INCREASE IN CULTIVATION

Classified By: CDA RICHARD NORLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) Summary: President Karzai met with governors and or deputy governors from 19 provinces on January 24 as governor-led eradication begins in Afghanistan. The President stressed the GOA's commitment to sustain the reduced opium cultivation levels of the previous year and to further reduce cultivation in 2006. The governors/deputy governors pledged their support and agreed to eradicate opium in their provinces. On January 25, provincial authorities met with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and US and UK officials to finalize operational plans for eradication in their respective provinces. It was determined that all indications are that opium cultivation in Helmand has sharply increased and the situation is such that a special Task Force for Operational Planning for Eradication needs to be convened for Helmand. The first meeting of the Task Force is scheduled for January 26. End Summary.

2. (C) On January 24, President Karzai met with approximately 13 governors and six deputy governors (and/or acting governors) from key poppy growing areas in Afghanistan. All seven Poppy Elimination Program (PEP) provinces were represented. The meeting was arranged by the Ministry of Interior to allow President Karzai, at the beginning of governor-led Eradication (GLE), to once again impress upon the governors, the GOA's commitment to reducing opium cultivation and the role that the governors must play in order to sustain the opium cultivation reduction results of last year and reduce cultivation further this year.

"Destroy opium or destroy Afghanistan"

3. (C) The President discussed the achievements of Afghanistan, thanks to international support, and said that the only threat and obstacle to prosperity for Afghanistan was opium and its trail of destruction. He discussed the increased addiction levels and the shame that the drug was bringing to Afghanistan, the potential loss of international support if Afghanistan does not act, the criminalization of the Afghan economy and the potential for bankruptcy, and the clear linkage between drug trafficking and terrorism in Afghanistan. At one point in his presentation (which was 25 minutes long and done without notes) Karzai said, "if we don't root out opium, it will root us out-destroy opium or opium destroys Afghanistan, do you understand?" At this point, the audience of some 60 officials (from 19 provinces) exclaimed that they understood.

4. (C) President Karzai went on to say that the world and international community were doubtful that Afghanistan could eliminate opium. He told the crowd that the world is very sensitive to the problem and does not want to hear reasons why it is difficult to eliminate opium and said, "the people of Afghanistan have sacrificed more than a million Afghans to save the country and reach the level where we currently are...this is a far greater sacrifice than what it will take to eliminate opium." Karzai concluded by saying that the responsibility for eliminating opium begins with the governors but is also the responsibility of the police leaders and religious leaders as well and he implored them to take this responsibility to heart and restore the prestige of Afghanistan.

5. (C) After his presentation, Karzai spent an additional hour listening to the views and problems of the provincial representatives. The usual claims of poverty and lack of development assistance were heard but not as much as normal. The more prevailing comments were that the provincial leaders agreed with the President and were taking action to support him, including already conducting eradication operations. The President spoke about his upcoming trip to London and said that he would be working with potential international donors to obtain additional development funds for the provinces. He also said that upon his return to Kabul, he would work with the Ministry of Finance to ensure some additional funds would be sent to the provinces to assist with funding the operation of the provincial councils.

## Operational plans for GLE Developed

16. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting with the President, the provincial authorities were bused to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where they continued meeting with officials from the Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN), the UNODC, the US and the UK. Representatives from the North, South, East, West and Northeast of Afghanistan expressed their views regarding the opium situation in their respective provinces and spoke of their commitment to reducing opium cultivation through eradication. Deputy Minister Daud (to the chagrin of the UNODC representative in attendance) outlined the summary findings of UNODC's Rapid Assessment Survey (RAS) of opium cultivation in Afghanistan. (UNODC was slightly uneasy because the survey will not be officially released until after the London Conference). There was general acceptance that there was increased opium planting this year and aggressive GLE is essential to reduce the same. The meeting concluded, in the late afternoon, by obtaining agreement that each provincial team (Governor, provincial council leader) would meet the next day with the MOI, the US and UK to complete the opium eradication operational plan for their respective provinces.

17. (C) On January 25, each provincial team met with MOI officials, including Deputy Minister Daud and Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) General Amiri, INL Eradication Specialist Mick Hogan, UK Eradication Specialist James Hardy, DynCorp AEF and PEP Support Team and CNTF Director Doug Wankel. The meetings went on all day and were very fruitful with most provinces having their operational plans approved or assistance provided to enable them to finalize the same and present to the US/UK eradication specialists within the next 3-5 working days. The US and UK eradication specialists were very satisfied the results of the meetings. The CNTF will provide additional details about the plans within the next week.

Bad, but not unexpected, news from Helmand

18. (C) One major problem surfaced during the operational planning session when Deputy Governor Amir Mohammed Akhunzada of Helmand Province announced that opium planting in Helmand province far surpassed the level of planting last year. Deputy Governor Amir (brother of former Governor Sher Mohammed) said that planting this year could be as much as double the level of last year in Helmand. (NOTE: UNODC reported that last year's level was 26,500 hectares--25 percent of total cultivation and the USG reported that 38,500 hectares or 41 percent of all cultivation occurred in Helmand). Deputy Governor Amir's claims mirror those that UNODC has informally voiced to CNTF Director Wankel this week. Wankel stopped the planning session and said that such level of planting, if true (and Wankel said that he did not dispute it), changed the operational planning needs required to address eradication planning and resource requirements in Helmand. He went on to say that if the cultivation situation is such in Helmand, Afghanistan could not succeed this year in sustaining the cultivation reduction results of last year and would not be able to obtain further cultivation reduction unless there was significant eradication in Helmand. In other words, if we fail in Helmand this year, we will fail in Afghanistan. This assessment was agreed upon by Deputy Minister Daud and the others at the planning session. To further complicate the issue, the Deputy Governor stated that the security situation in Helmand was such as to make eradication difficult and dangerous and there would need to be significant security enhancement to the Helmand police and security force. It became apparent that the situation in Helmand was such that there was the need for a Helmand eradication planning Task Force.

19. (C) Near the conclusion of the meeting, General Daud telephoned Governor Engineer Daoud in Lashkargah and discussed with the governor the thoughts that had just been presented and invited the governor to travel to Kabul on the next day (January 26) to meet with the MOI, US, UK, MCN, NDS, Ministry of Defense, CFC-A, PRT and others to discuss the very serious situation in Helmand regarding opium cultivation for 2006 and to discuss options and needs for conducting eradication operations in Helmand. Governor Daoud agreed to travel to Kabul to participate in the Task Force meeting and said he would bring his Police Chief and his Chief of the National Directorate of Security as well. The PRT was able to assist by providing transportation on the PRT plane from Lashkargah to Kabul on January 26.

110. (C) Comment: What is apparent is the need for additional eradication resources and planning to ensure that the level of eradication effort (i.e. the requirement for a larger eradication force, the need for extended duration of effort, the probable need for additional security and the intensive care needed to manage the effort) is made available and

supported by the GOA, the USG and the UK. This needs assessment and planning effort will also have to take into account that any enhanced and extended eradication operations could result in security strains or issues in the province and region and it is important that the MOD and CFC-A be included in all future discussions. This eradication planning and needs assessment for Helmand will be a difficult problem to deal with and will take considerable thought and resources. The good news is the stakeholders realize it, have their sleeves rolled up and have time to resolve the problem. End Comment.  
NORLAND